

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to: (1) evaluate conditions surrounding the M-15 corridor between I-75 and I-69; (2) develop and evaluate improvement alternatives; (3) narrow those to practical alternatives, and finally a recommended alternative; and, (4) gain environmental approval from FHWA on the recommended alternative so that it can advance to the design phase. Corridor alternatives will be evaluated using objective criteria (including cost) in consideration of legal and regulatory requirements, and in cooperation with the general public and other interested parties. This has been a process that has afforded early and continuing involvement of the general public, elected officials, public agencies and regulatory bodies, private providers of transportation, and other stakeholders in Oakland and Genesee Counties.

As noted earlier, the study area is bounded by I-69 on the north, I-75 on the south and a band generally one mile wide to the east and west of M-15. But these boundaries were expanded as a result of the public involvement process and the study of new-corridor alignment alternatives.

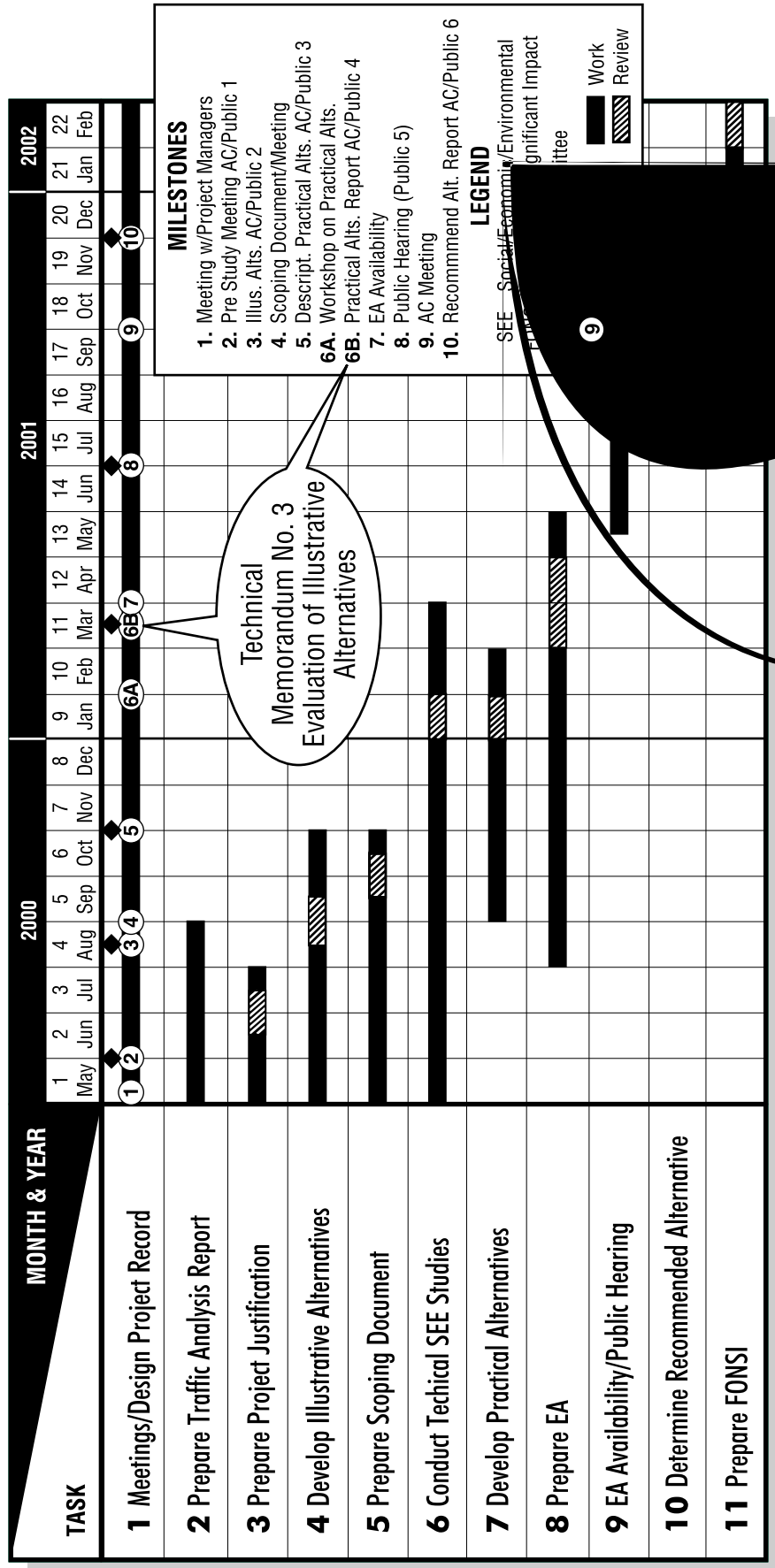
Alternatives that have been examined are: (1) the no action (no build) alternative; (2) minor physical and operational improvements to roads in the M-15 corridor, including Transportation System Management (TSM) techniques; (3) improvements to the existing local road infrastructure with no major changes to M-15; (4) reconstruction of M-15 to increase capacity including several potential roadway types on its existing alignment; and, (5) placement of M-15 on new alignment for some portion(s) of its length.

1.3 Schedule

The project is scheduled for completion by early 2002 (Figure 1-3). Much of the technical analysis comes in the first half of the study with the review/approval process extending over almost another year after. The review process is lengthy and exhaustive to ensure that the public has been heard and that all environmental impacts have been properly identified and addressed.

The first row in the schedule indicates ten milestones in the course of the project, including numerous meetings with the public. The first round of meetings was held in early June 2000. It focused on introducing the MDOT/Consultant Project Team; defining the project schedule; and, soliciting improvement concepts as well as key issues of an environmental, social, and/or transportation nature. The second round of public meetings

Figure 1-3
Schedule



was held in the latter part of August. At that time, preliminary (Illustrative) alternatives were presented to the public for review. Preliminary traffic analysis related to the number of required lanes in the corridor to satisfy future travel demand were presented. A workshop preceded the public meetings. It examined alternative land use “what if” scenarios that could affect travel in the next 20+ years. That information was used to determine if land use shifts could change the need for improving M-15.

Following the August public meeting, technical studies were conducted to support a screening/evaluation of the preliminary (Illustrative) alternatives. Another round of public meetings was held in October to gain input on this evaluation (Figure 1-3).

A “scoping document” was prepared. It informed the public and agencies at all levels of government of the practical alternatives under consideration and sought more in-depth agency involvement in the impact analysis and alternatives evaluation. Agency guidance will be instrumental in determining the final alternative consistent with legal and regulatory guidance. A process of soliciting this input began in September with meetings in Lansing and Ortonville (see Technical Memorandum No. 2 for the scoping document).

Since the October 2000 public meetings, the consultant has focused on two basic alternatives: a five-lane cross section (four through-lanes and a center lane for turning vehicles) and a narrow-boulevard (four lanes for through travel and a landscaped median to protect turning vehicles). A one-way pair concept has been studied in the Village of Goodrich. These “Practical” Alternatives remained after the first-level evaluation. They were refined and presented to the public in a workshop held on January 24, 2001. Since then, the alternatives and their impact data have received additional refinement.

The evaluation of the Practical Alternatives is the subject of this technical memorandum. It will be summarized along with other required information in a document known as an Environmental Assessment. It will be the subject of comment at a public hearing tentatively scheduled for June 2001. Based on input from the public and ongoing dialogue with other stakeholders and agencies, further refinements will be made to develop the recommended alternative. A Recommended Alternative Report will be prepared after the public hearing based on public and agency comments. If no significant environmental impacts have been found, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be sought from FHWA; otherwise, an Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared. If the interchanges at I-69 and/or I-75 are modified, Interchange Justification studies may

be necessary. They document that any changes to the interstate highways are in the best interest of the public and that the changes do not compromise the functioning of the interstates as through travel routes. These studies require independent approval of FHWA.